www.historymarg.com

Global Advanced Research Journal of History, Political Science and International Relations Vol. 1(5) pp. 108-112, July, 2012
Available online http://garj.org/garjhpsir/index.htm
Copyright © 2012 Global Advanced Research Journals

Review

Gandhi: A prophet of satyagraha and nonviolence

Asmat Ullah Wazir[1] and Jamshed Khan[2]*

[1]Lecturer in Ara Khel College Kohat Asmatullah
[2]PhD student at the department of History, Quaid-i-Azam University Islamabad, and Pakistan.

Accepted 12 July, 2012

In the darkest hours of the history the nature endowed the sub-Continent with a man who lit his life for the illumination of each and every corner of the continent and rendered meritorious services for the amelioration of his fellow men irrespective of social, ethnic, religious and cultural backgrounds. The light and glitter of his archetype humanitarianism was not limited to the frontiers of sub-Continent rather it reached to the farthest horizons of the world to equally facilitate his brothers and sisters who were groaning hard under the discriminatory legislation of the South African authorities. The main objective of his life was to undo the injustices committed by the unbridled powers of the imperialists and put in order the indigenous society by weeding out all the invidious evils which had made life hellish for some segments of the society. That is what he did for turning the lot of the Untouchables of the hard-core Hindu society.

Keywords: Gandhi, Satyayagrah, Non-Violence.

INTRODUCTION

In the darkest hours of the history the nature endowed the sub-Continent with a man who lit his life for the illumination of each and every corner of the continent and rendered meritorious services for the amelioration of his fellow men irrespective of social, ethnic, religious and cultural backgrounds. The light and glitter of his archetype humanitarianism was not limited to the frontiers of sub-Continent rather it reached to the farthest horizons of the world to equally facilitate his brothers and sisters who were groaning hard under the discriminatory legislation of the South African authorities. The main objective of his life was to undo the injustices committed by the unbridled powers of the imperialists and put in order the indigenous society by weeding out all the invidious evils which had made life hellish for some segments of the society. That is what he did for turning the lot of the Untouchables of the hard-core Hindu society.

*Corresponding author E-mail: nashadwajid@gmail.com

Indeed, his thin beggar like physic was nauseating for some the people of the time, particularly from the upper echelon of the foreigners. Yet, neither had he bothered to listen to such abusing language nor it became an obstacle for him to deviate his attention from the persuasion of his philanthropic program.To his credit, the angelic man did not copy and borrow concepts and strategies from others rather innovative he himself was to the level that his methods not only brought the desired results of the time rather his modus-operandi became a golden principle for the future generation to follow in. His dynamic personality and continuous struggle for the human being and his hectic fight against the highhandedness of imperial British in India left behind a rich treasure full of incidents and events which cannot be encompassed even in voluminous books, thereby beyond the scope of this short paper. Therefore, here we would try to limit ourselves to his philosophy of Satyagraha which left far reaching effects on the world ingeneral.In the paper efforts would be made to highlight a few incidents where he employed the Satyagraha in the

www.historymarg.com

course of his life struggle.

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi was born on 2 October 1869at Porbandar, the capital of a small princely state Kathiawar. Gandhi belonged to the Vaisya caste, representing the trader class in traditional Hindu caste system (YogeshChandha, *Rediscovering Gandhi*, (London: Century Books Limited, 1997), p. 1). In Rajkot, Mohandas and his brothers attended first a local primary school and then Alfred High School. During his school days he was mediocre and shy student. In 1888, Gandhi went to England and joined the London University and Inner Temple. After his three years stay in England he returned to India in 1891 as lawyer. On return enrolled in Bombay High Court as advocate. In 1993, he went to South Africa and enrolled as an advocate of Natal Supreme Court (B. R. Ambedkar, *What Congress and Gandhi Have Done To The Untouchables* (Lahore: Classic Publishers, 1977), p. 253). He stayed there for eleven years. During his stay he founded the Transvaal British Indian Association and fought hard against the humiliating laws of the authorities. He returned to India in 1915 (April Carter, *Mahatma Gandhi: A Selected Bibliography*, (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1995), p. 1.). He joined the Congress and in 1920 he became the leader of the party and remained till 1934. During his period of leadership he gave a tough response to the British. In 1948, he was killed a fanatic Hindu NathuramGodse, arguing that he was provoked by Gandhi's constant pandering to the Muslims (Stanley Wolpert, *Gandhi's Passion: the Life and Legacy of Mahatma Gandhi*, (New York, Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 259). Thus, the Great Soul and Little Bapudeparted from the cruel world which even did not let him a graceful death despite his tremendous services to the humanity.

Tracing his legacy we come across thousands of incidents at home and across the globe where Gandhi philosophy of nonviolence has hypnotized the people. The basic rationale behind this tremendous influence on the world is that the end of his ceaseless efforts and struggle was the welfare and uplift of humanity.Angela is an American, a veteran of civil right struggle, and a devotee of nonviolence, the one who was greatly influenced with Gandhi ideas and strategies directed for the achievement of the objectives of the society and talking the highhandedness of the authorities.Kyle is her Australian suitor, who took active part for the welfare of the people and did all these in the lines of Gandhi Satyagraha. Even Gandhi ideas were imported to the Australian continent and his fans rapidly grew over this part of the world too (Sean Scalmer, *Gandhi in the West: The Mahatma and the Rise of Radical Protests*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 1-2).

His most popular legacy is Satyagraha or nonviolence. Gandhi says about the Satyagraha, "The fight of Satyagraha is for the strong in spirit, not the doubter or the timid. Satyagraha teaches us the art of living as well as dying" (Anne M. Todd, *Spiritual Leaders and Thinkers: Mohandas Gandhi*, (New York: Chelsea House, 2004), p. 34). At another place he said that 'to forgive is only the attributes of strong, the weak cannot exercise it'. The hard fact is that Gandhi philosophy of nonviolence is still enigmatic and quite confusing. Even his ardent followers and staunch advocates confess that they have yet not fully grasped the Satyagraha.Angela translated the Gandhian term of Satyagraha as "non-violence" (Sean Scalmer, *Gandhi in the West)*. Yet, the Angela translation of the word Satyagraha does not adequately represent the complete essence of the word. Indeed, non-violence is a part of his philosophy but it is only a single element that is called *ahimsa.*It is a combination of different concepts and ideas.

David Hardiman has defined the word Satyagraha in the following manner. Satyagraha is an amalgamation of two Gujarati words, *satya* (truth) and *agraha* (taking, holding, seizing), the implication being that one seizes hold of the truth. Gandhi equated *satya* with God. As he told LanzadelVasto in 1937, "Truth is God" (David Hardiman, *Gandhi in His Times and Ours: The Global Legacy of His Ideas*, (London: Hurst and Company, 2003), p. 51). David then proceeds to define the word non-violence (*ahimsa*) separately. He quotes Bondurant, who pointed out that Gandhi non-violence is deeply rooted in religions. She claims that the aphorism found in Mahabharata: *ahimsa paramodharmah* (non-violence is the greatest religious duty).Non-violence is also quite important in Jainism. Jainism is even particularly scrupulous about not to harm the insects.Its followers are strictly instructed to sift water before drinking it so as to ensure that there are no insects in it (Ibid., pp. 57-58). It is argued that Gandhi took inspiration from different religions and strictly acted upon the religious teachings.To David Hardiman the Satyagraha and Ahimsa are two different words. But the fact is that Satyagraha is a richly loaded philosophy which encompasses different concepts. The following discussion may help to clarify the philosophy of Satyagraha.

The Satyagraha and non-violence are so intertwined like two sides of coin. The interconnection in Gandhi taught is such that it is difficult to treat them separately. To analyze one is necessary to involve the other. Satyagraha is a direct corollary of non-violence. Since Gandhi was dissatisfied with the phrase "passive resistance" that he felt the need for more accurate and more suitable term to designate and describe the principle he was propounding (Glyn Richards, *Philosophy of Gandhi: A Study of His Basic Ideas*, (Richmond: Curzon press Limited, 1995), p. 48). The term that was first suggested by one of his follower in South Africa was Sadagraha, which literally means holding firm to reality. Yet, Gandhi reshaped it to the current Satyagraha which could explain his ideas in better way. Truth (*Satya*)

www.historymarg.com

implies love, and firmness (*agaraha*) engenders and therefore serves as a synonym for force.I thus began to the Indian movement 'Satyagraha', that is to say, the force which is born of Truth and Love or Non-violence (Glyn Richards, *Philosophy of Gandhi*. 48-49). Thus, Gandhi distinguished his non-violence movement from the European word 'passive resistance' as the latter was associated with the weak suffragettes and Gandhi wanted to portray that non-violence is not only the weapon of weak rather the powerful could use it too.

Gandhi non-violence by contrast was rooted in altruism and compassion towards fellow humans. He stated in 1915 that non-violence involved qualities such as *daya* and *aman*. In Gujarati daya meant, pity, compassion, mercy, clemency, sympathy, tenderness. Aman was from an Arabic word meaning security, and in this context meant essentially 'peace'. The general thrust of Gandhi's injunction was that ahimsa involved qualities of respect and sympathy for the opponent, freedom from anger and desire for peace (David Hardiman, *Gandhi in His Times and Ours,* 58).

He established the Satyagraha during his stay in South Africa. He also brought in use in the same soil when the Indian community of Africa was seen at the crossroad due the inhuman laws of the government concerned. In 1893, the region consisted of the British colonies of the Cape Town and Natal and the Boer (Dutch settler) republics of Orange Free States and the Transvaal. Indians had been coming to Transvaal and Natal to work. They were bound for five years, after which they could take a paid passage home or stay on as free laborers. Many decided to stay and gradually outnumbered the white population in Natal. The growing influx alarmed the white settlers and Indians were subjected harassment and discrimination and from 1894 the conditions steadily deteriorated for the Indians (EknathEaswaran, *Gandhi the Man: How One Man Changed Himself To Change The World*, (Tomeles: Nilgiri Press, 2011), p. 174). A bill before Natal legislature proposed to deprive all Indians of the franchise, except those who had already registered to vote. Gandhi was hired by Dada Abdullah and others to help organize the Indian opposition (Kathryn Tidrick, *Gandhi: A Political and Spiritual Life*, (London: I. B. Tauris, 2006), p. 53). Gandhi took amiss when the Transvaal government enacted a law by which all the Indians were supposed to register themselves by giving the ten-finger prints. He did not leaveany stone unturned to resist the new law. During his protests he was put behind the bars for several times but he did not bow before Gen. Smut's law (NagindasSanghavi, *The Agony of Arrival: Gandhi: The South Africa Years*, (New Delhi: Rupaand Co, 2006), p. 306). The agitations continued till 1914. Eventually he succeeded in repealing the infamous law.

He brought the idea of Satyagraha to India and in 1919 Rowlatt Act was passed which denied the people an appeal against the decision of the court, and provincial governments were given immense powers in matters of arrest, searches and seizures, confinement of suspects, censorship and so on. Jinnah resigned from the Central Legislature in protest. Gandhi launched a movement of Satyagraha and called for country wide protests. Though the movement was peaceful yet it resulted in colossal bloodshed when Gen. Dyer troops opened indiscriminate firing at the public meeting at JallianwalaBagh. Gandhi called off the Satyagraha movement due to the killing (Hamid Khan, *Constitutional and Political History of Pakistan*, 2nd ed., (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 16). As the situation has adopted a violent magnitude where Gandhi's technique of peaceful Satyagraha could not work, therefore he abandoned the movement.

Similarly, Gandhi was at fore front of the Khilafat Movement and has assumed the leadership of Muslims masses in the protests. He also launched a non-cooperation (Michael Hart, *TheHundred: A Ranking of Most Influential Persons in History*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1992), p. 518-19) movement which was his card to complement the Satyagraha in times when the authorities were not heeding to the demands of the masses.Even he threatened the government of civil-disobedience if the government did not agree. However, the atmosphere of cooperation did not long last because of the incident of ChouriChoura in February 1922 (S. R. Bakshi, Indian National Movement and the Raj, Vol. 2, (New Delhi: criterion Publications, 1991), p. 143), where a highly charged mob set fire to a police station resulting in twenty two deaths. Gandhi immediately called off the non-cooperation movement, due the awful incident, which went against the Gandhi principle of non-violence (Hamid Khan, *Constitutional and Political History of Pakistan,* p. 16).

The levying tax on salt was one of the most obnoxious and invidious episode in the history of British rule the Sub-Continent. Gandhi, the Great Soul (F. G. Bailey, *God-Brothers and Other True Believers: Gandhi, Hitler and the religious Religious Right*, (New York: Berghahn Books, 2008), p. 149. The title was given by Rabindranath Tagor. Gandhi professed to be embarrassed by it, "Thank God my much vaunted Mahatmaship has never fooled me" (*Harijan* 1936)), coped with the challenge by employing his most popular modus-operandi that is non-violence. It must be noted that before resorting to the peaceful march, earlier he had sent a letter to the Viceroy of India to repeal the law otherwise he and his co-workers of *Ashram* will commence a march (Anne M. Todd, *Spiritual Leaders and Thinkers: Mohandas Gandhi*, (New York: Chelsea House, 2004), p. 45). When the authorities turned deaf ears to his demand then on 12 March 1930, a thin scantily clad with a walking stick stepped into the road from Ahmadabad to the Arabian Sea with seventy men and women. It took twenty-four days to cover the distance of 241 miles. At night the walkers slept under

www.historymarg.com

the trees. The Gandhi reason for undertaking this journey was to protest the taxing of Indian salt, one of India's natural resources. In 1930, under the British Law the Indians were not allowed to collect and make their own salt, continually washed up by the sea unto the coastal shores. Not only the Indians were to buy the processed salt they needed from the British, but they also had to pay tax on that salt. To call attention to the injustice of salt law, Gandhi planned to publically break the law by gathering the salt himself. Thousands of Indians joined him and on 5 April the marchers arrived (Ibid). Though his march did not yielded the desired results as he was arrested soon, yet his peaceful and non-violent salt protests drew world-wide attention to the Indian struggle for Independence. Despite these few incidents there are numerous others where Gandhi resorted to the Satyagraha and ahimsa, which would be just repetition of such kind of situation. Since, he joined the Congress in 1915, he not only turned the party into a mass party rather most of its political strategies were shaped by Gandhi till 1935 quite directly and then to independence indirectly as was no more the head of Congress (Lawrence Ziring, *Pakistan at the Crosscurrent of History*, (Lahore: Vanguard Publishers, 2004), p. 5).

Additionally, Gandhi was not only a politician. He was also a social reformer. He saw many things wrong with the Hindu way of life. He insisted that the 'untouchables'- below the bottom line of the Hindu caste must be treated as equal. They must be allowed to enter the same temples and use the same wells as the high caste Hindus (Stephen Hugh-Jones, *The Giants of Asia: India, Pakistan, China, Japan*, (London: George Allen and Unwind LTD, 1967), p. 24). This contempt for the untoward practice was smoldering within him from the very beginning when he used to touch a scavenger Uka in spite of parents repeated disdain for acts (YogeshChandha, *Rediscovering Gandhi*, p. 10).

Here we should assess the influence of Gandhi legacy both within and outside the India categorically. His technique of civil resistance rapidly became a central feature of Indian politics. It followed its own rituals like holding fasts, flag hoisting and violation of selected laws (David Hardiman, *Gandhi in His Times and Ours,* p. 63). In 1921, the Sikh Akalis decided to deploy Satyagraha in their demand for popular control over the Sikh temples.The hard-headed Sikh even followed the Gandhi's strategies of protests (Mohinder Singh, *TheAkali Movement*, (Delhi: Macmillan Publishers, 1978), p. 52). There was similar upturning when the Pashtoons of North West Frontier Province (currently KPK) launched a series of non-violent Satyagraha under Ghafar Khan (M. S. Korejo, *The Frontier Gandhi: His Place in History*, (Karachi: Oxford university press, 1993), p. 47-71). Yet some analysts believe that Ghafar Khan Idea was more genuine and stable than Gandhi.

In some cases fasting merges with mass protest. For example in 1991, 25o residents of Ralegan Siddhi, led by social worker Anna Hazare went on fast when the government failed to failed to grant recognition to their village school. Within hours the authorities backed down and recognized the school (Vivek Pinto, Gandhi Vision and Value: The Moral Quest for Change in the Indian Agriculture, (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1998), p. 150). In the recent years Anna Hazare held very massive protests against the pervasive corruption within a state of India. There are numerous petty incidents like this but the fact is that Gandhi did not leave permanent impacts on the state and its policies. India has emerged further belligerent and antagonistic. It fought almost four wars with Pakistan and one war with China.In 1998, it carried out nuclear tests which posed a serious threat to the neighboring countries (Wolpert, *Gandhi's Passion,* p. 8. Also in Hart, *TheHundred,* pp. 518-19).

Looking at Gandhi global legacy, we see that today, Gandhi persists as a symbol of anti colonial struggle and somatic discipline, a prophet of love and technician of protests. His image adorns major advertisement and his life story is a subject of books and films. His writings have been collected in hundreds of volumes and his pithy epigrams adorn the desk calendar and manual of direct action. Historians have identified Mahatma's influence in the developing fields of peace studies, environmentalism and popular education. Gandhi tireless advocacy of non-violence has been vindicated in later struggle and codified in important works of theory and history. Figures as diverse as Lech Walesa, Aung San SuuKyi, Nelson Mandela and Dalai Lama have been dubbed as the 'children of Gandhi'. Subsequently, 'Gandhism' has survived (Sean Scalmer, *Gandhi in the West.* 239).

Western recognition was horribly so belated. At first there was incomprehension. While the Westerners eyes were precisely fixed at the strange person of Gandhi and his activities were long enveloped in curtain. For years it remained difficult to establish what Gandhi did and what he aimed to achieve (Ibid). Though is a fact that Gandhi humanitarian ideas got global quite late. It is a bitter reality that his golden principles were not whole-heartedly followed by his own state after his tragic demise but does not mean that his ideas are either not practicable or valueless. Today, in most of the museums of the world his ugly statues have been kept because of his excessive dedication and consideration for the welfare of the people. His religious pluralism, his firm and unwavering belief on non-violence contributed considerably to the humanity. It is crystal clear that his philosophy of Satyagraha and non-violence was frequently followed by different leaders across the world. Trite phrases such as 'Hindu saint' and 'Father of the Nation' do not describe his true place in history of human civilization. Paying his tribute to Gandhi on his seventy-fifth birthday, Professor Einstein Wrote: 'Generations to come, it may be, will scare believe that such a one as this ever in the flesh and blood walked upon this earth'.

www.historymarg.com

REFERENCES

Ambedkar BR (1977). *What Congress and Gandhi Have Done To The Untouchables.* Lahore: Classic Publishers.

Bailey FG (2008). *God-Brothers and Other True Believers: gandhi, Hitler and Religious Right.* New York: Berghahn Books.

Bakshi SR (1991). *Indian National Movement and The Raj vol.2.* New Delhi: Criterion Publications.

Carter April (1995). *Mahatma Gandhi: A Selected Bibliography.* Westport: Greenwood Press.

Chandha Yogesh (1997). *Rediscovering Gandhi.* London: Century Books Limited.

Easwaran Eknath (2011). *Gandhi the Man: How One man Changed Himself to Change The World.* Tomeles: Nilgiri Press,.

Hardiman David (2003). *Gandhi in His Times and Ours: The Global Legacy of His Ideas.* London: Hurst and Company.

Hart Michael (1992). *The Hundered: A Ranking of Most Influential Persons in History.* New York: simon and Schuster.

Hugh-Jones Stephen (1967). *The Giants of Asia: India, Pakistan, China, Japan.* London: George Allen and Unwind Ltd.

Khan Hamid (2009). *Constitutional and Political History of Pakistan 2nd ed.* Karachi: Oxford University press.

Korejo MS (1993). *The Frontier Gandhi: His Place in History.* Karachi: Oxford University Press.

Pinto Vivek (1998). *Gandhi Vision and Value: The Moral Quest for Change in the Indian Agricultural.* New Delhi: Sage publications.

Richards Glyn (1995). *Philosophy of Gandhi: A Study of His Basic Ideas.* Richmond: Curzon Press Limited.

Sanghavi Nagindas (2006). *The Agony of Arrival: Gandhi: The South Africa Years.* New Delhi: Rupa and Co.

Scalmer Sean (2011). *Gandhi in the West: The Mahatma and the Riseof Radical Protest.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Singh Mohinder (1978). *The Akali Movement.* Delhi: Macmillan Publishers.

Tidrick Kathryn (2006). *Gandhi: A Political and Spiritual Life.* London: I.B. Tauris,.

Todd Anne M (2004). *Spiritual Leaders and Thinkers: Mohandas Gandhi.* New York: Chelsea House.

Wolpert Stanley (2001). *Gandhi's Passion: The Life and Legacy of Mahatma Gandhi.* New York: Oxford University Press.

Ziring Lawrence (2004). *Pakistan at the Crosscurrent of History.* Lahore: Vanguard Publishers.